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UNDP Evaluation

Annual report on evaluation 2025

Summary

The Annual Report on Evaluation presents an overview of the work of the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) in 2025 and the resources that enabled these achievements. In accordance with the Executive Board decision 2020/15, the report illustrates key insights from a selection of evaluations completed in 2025, highlighting both results and recurring challenges that UNDP must address. It explores how the Office evaluations were used across UNDP, drawing attention to the factors contributing to the improvements observed in 2025. The report also appreciates the enhanced quality of decentralized evaluations, while recommending improvements in their breadth and strategic use. The report summarizes the Independent Evaluation Office's collaboration with evaluation units across the United Nations system and with external partners, concluding with a brief update on evaluation activities carried out by UNDP-hosted entities.

Elements of a decision

The Executive Board may wish to: (a) take note of the Annual Report on Evaluation and (b) encourage UNDP to strengthen the use of decentralized evaluations for decision-making.

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I. UNDP evaluation in 2025

1. The Annual Report draws on a set of complementary evidence sources to assess the reach and use of UNDP's evaluation products. Insights into the quality and utility of IEO's work were informed by the Office's analytics and annual stakeholder survey, which received 318 responses from Executive Board members, UNDP senior management, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) officers, and partners. Evidence on decentralized evaluations was derived from the Evaluation Resource Center (ERC) and the IEO quality assessment process. A review of 125 evaluation reports from 2022 to 2025 examined the clarity and robustness of management responses and action plans, the factors facilitating or constraining their implementation, and the extent to which evaluation recommendations have been informing decisions and driving programmatic changes.

Strategic direction

2. The new UNDP Evaluation Policy, which the Executive Board approved in September 2025 (DP/2025/28/Rev.1), set the strategic direction for the UNDP evaluation function through 2030. The policy was informed by an independent review (DP/2025/6), which confirmed the robustness of UNDP's evaluation architecture. The direct line of accountability between the IEO Director and the Executive Board, together with resource benchmarks defined in the policy, will continue to safeguard the independence, impartiality, and integrity that are fundamental to credible evaluation. Coordination with the UNDP Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS) during the policy review process strengthened the connection with the UNDP results-based management strategy and the broader programme and project management architecture.

3. The theory of change in the UNDP Evaluation Policy 2025–2030 articulated the organization's vision for an evaluation function that contributes fully to stronger development results. Beyond the commitment to delivering credible and timely evaluations, to ensure learning and accountability, the theory of change identified key preconditions for influence: institutional commitment to evaluation, investments in capacity, incentives for UNDP staff and partners to apply evaluative evidence, and the creation of space for learning and adaptation. Advancing all these dimensions together will enhance trust in UNDP's evidence base and strengthen the organization's contribution to sustainable human development through interventions that benefit people and the planet.

4. The IEO translated this analysis into its multi-year workplan 2026–2029 (DP/2026/7), setting out three core orientations to further strengthen the relevance and utility of its work:

(a) **Strategic focus**. Evaluations will target areas of highest risk and strategic importance, directing resources where they deliver the greatest value for oversight and decision-making. The Office will prioritize evaluations across all Strategic Plan areas, including corporate assessments that are especially critical in a period of institutional transformation. Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs) will focus on contexts characterized by higher complexity, volatility, and value. In more stable settings, less frequent evaluations will allow for deeper assessment of long-term impact and systemic change, reflecting the time horizons over which development results typically materialize.

(b) **Responsiveness to emerging needs**. The Office will continue to adjust its workplan in response to emerging requests from the Executive Board and UNDP senior management, ensuring that evaluation coverage aligns with evolving organizational information needs. Artificial intelligence will support efficiency by enabling timely production of concise, targeted evidence products.

(c) **Audience-driven engagement**. Each evaluation and knowledge product will be guided by a structured audience and engagement questionnaire. This instrument identifies intended users and their information requirements at the outset, informing evaluation design, timing and communication. The approach will strengthen relevance and use while fully preserving the independence and impartiality of the evaluation.

Delivery

5. In 2025, the IEO delivered on its core mandate and workplan (DP/2022/6) - producing relevant, quality evaluations to help decision-making through better data and evaluative insights. These included three thematic and corporate evaluations, 20 ICPEs (covering $3 billion of UNDP delivery since 2022), and four 'Reflections' synthesis reports including lessons from past evaluations to support organizational learning. Evaluations and syntheses provided valuable information to help UNDP, its Executive Board, national governments and partners shape UNDP positioning around areas of comparative advantage and identified ways to address bottlenecks to delivery and effectiveness.

Table 1: 2025 IEO reports

Corporate and thematic evaluations	ICPEs	Reflections
Evaluation of UNDP Strategic Plan 2022-2025 Formative evaluation of UNDP Funding Windows Evaluation of UNDP support to electoral capacities and institutional processes	**Africa (6):** Botswana; Cameroon; Republic of Congo; Eritrea; Mozambique; Zimbabwe **Asia and Pacific (4):** Bangladesh; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Thailand; Vietnam **Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States (2):** Albania; Tajikistan **Latin America and the Caribbean (8):** Caribbean Multi-Country Offices (Barbados and Eastern Caribbean, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago); Chile; Guatemala; Guyana; Peru; Suriname	Stabilization and development Shaping the future of work through digital livelihoods Adapting to climate change in the most vulnerable contexts Green and just transitions through a justice lens

6. Capacity development initiatives contributed to strengthening decentralized evaluations and supported a stronger evaluation culture across UNDP and beyond. The IEO updated its Evaluation Methodology Center and published guidelines to conduct portfolio and impact evaluations. Five webinars enhanced the capacity of UNDP M&E focal points on thematic evaluations, evaluation and artificial intelligence, recommendations and evaluation use – among others. The Office continued to promote quality decentralized evaluations by recognizing excellence and good practices. The fifth edition of the Evaluation Excellence Awards highlighted five exemplar reports, including for their attention to gender equality, and recognized the consistent high-quality of evaluations by UNDP Country Offices under the Regional Bureau for Arab States between 2021 and 2024. The presence of UNDP senior leadership at the awards underscored evaluation excellence as an organizational priority.

Innovation and efficiency gains

7. The IEO continued to invest in the ethical use of artificial intelligence to strengthen evaluation processes and improve the use of evidence for learning and decision-making across UNDP. The Office maintained full disclosure on the use of artificial intelligence in its work and ensured that staff had the resources and training needed to apply artificial intelligence responsibly, in line with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) ethical principles for harnessing artificial intelligence in United Nations evaluations.

8. In 2025, the Artificial Intelligence for Development Platform (AIDA) underwent a major technological upgrade to address the limitations of its first-generation design. The platform moved to a Generative artificial intelligence pipeline which substantially improved the accuracy, contextual relevance, and practical usefulness of AIDA's outputs. The new architecture allowed updates with minimal re-engineering, reducing operating costs by more than 70 per cent. More than three quarters of users found that the platform made it easier and more time-efficient to access and use evaluation. The somewhat low uptake of AIDA is mostly driven by cultural and institutional factors rather than technical ones – including limited awareness, presence of alternative artificial intelligence tools, and entrenched work habits that have yet to incorporate the routine use of evaluation evidence when preparing meetings, designing projects, or developing publications. To further increase the use of evaluation through AIDA for UNDP decision making and programme design, the IEO planned a second phase of engagement around targeted, user-centered workshops. This will continue through 2026.

9. In partnership with a technology firm and Rutgers University's SOCRATES (Socially Cognizant Robotics for a Technology Enhance Society) National Research Traineeship Project, the Independent Evaluation Office developed an artificial intelligence tool to improve consistency and speed of quality assessments of UNDP decentralized evaluations. The adoption of the Artificial Intelligence for Quality Assessment tool led to significant efficiency gains, with the annual cost of assessing 250 decentralized evaluations dropping from approximately $200,000 to $10,000. The average time required to review each evaluation also decreased from four to five hours to approximately one and a half hours. The tool consistently achieved an accuracy rate of 80 per cent or higher, confirming its reliability. Once the tool is fully refined, the Office will consider making it available to UNDP more broadly and other United Nations evaluation offices, to strengthen and unify the quality assessment process.

10. In 2025, the IEO also made significant strides in harnessing automation and artificial intelligence to optimize research efficiency and facilitate operational tasks. The Office developed a Power BI template that automated the generation of project tables and streamlined financial analysis to support its evaluations. The Office also launched a bespoke application to automate the downloading of data and documents from the UNDP Transparency Portal, substantially increasing productivity. Payment and procurement processes were streamlined with the creation of workflow systems, allowing staff to submit and monitor requests with greater ease.

II. Insights from UNDP evaluations

11. A synthesis of 40 Independent Evaluation Office and decentralized evaluations and meta-analyses completed in 2025 surfaced common messages around UNDP performance: what worked, what did not, and why.

12. Evaluations recognized that UNDP strengthened its position in a turbulent development landscape and proved its value in moments of crisis. Supported by the flexible and integrated vision of the Strategic Plan, UNDP remained a vital partner for governments, guiding countries through evolving challenges. UNDP's global presence enabled reach and contextual understanding, while its broad mandate allowed it the flexibility to respond to diverse needs. In crisis contexts, UNDP's ability to deliver essential services, even under extreme conditions, further cemented its reputation as a dependable actor. Humanitarian agencies viewed their partnership with UNDP in protracted crises as a way to strengthen social contracts and promote inclusive recovery.

13. UNDP balanced continuity with change, improving existing systems while exploring new approaches. Strategic innovation, development financing and digitalization were woven into programming and helped the organization respond to complex pressures. Operational reforms - including the rollout of the Quantum Enterprise Resource Planning system, service clustering and centralized cost recovery - improved compliance, standardized processes and enabled better use of data. UNDP effectively leveraged trusted partnerships and funding mechanisms - including the Global Fund, Green Climate Fund, and Global Environment Facility (GEF) - to sustain critical work in a challenging financial landscape.

14. Across contexts and sectors, governance remained UNDP's most recognized and valued area of expertise within the United Nations development system. UNDP strengthened public administration and modernized services, and it helped sustain the functioning of core institutions during periods of disruption –

providing technical assistance and bridging capacity. In climate and environmental work, UNDP helped countries integrate adaptation, mitigation and biodiversity priorities into national development plans.

15. The value of UNDP laid in enabling complex changes across institutions and systems. Its results were strongest when it promoted integrated solutions that linked governance with human development and environmental priorities, aligning partners and remaining engaged long enough to embed reforms in institutions. UNDP was valued as a neutral convener.

16. Evaluations pointed out some systemic challenges that, when not properly addressed, limited the effectiveness, scale and durability of UNDP's results. These were mostly related to a business model that emphasized delivery, tied to a financial architecture largely reliant on extra-budgetary, earmarked funding.

17. Evaluations frequently noted that UNDP's portfolio was spread too thin, recommending a sharper focus. By pursuing separate interventions at the policy, organizational, or community level, UNDP's fragmented approach limited effectiveness and diluted impact. Conversely, more lasting progress was achieved when interventions tackled challenges from multiple perspectives, systematically addressing the primary barriers to change. Evaluations clarified that UNDP was not expected to address every challenge on its own. Instead, they recommended that UNDP concentrate its efforts on interventions with the greatest potential impact and collaborate strategically with other partners.

18. The effectiveness of UNDP interventions was frequently limited by short-term and unpredictable financial support, which severely impacted the capacity to promote durable change when trust, accountability and justice required longer time horizons. Because UNDP delivery capacity often relied on resources allocated to individual projects, questions arose about whether the foundational systems needed for program implementation could be sustained. Evaluations suggested that catalytic and pooled financing mechanisms could help reduce fragmented delivery by aligning partners around shared outcome pathways and providing the predictability and flexibility needed, especially in crisis and transition contexts where multi-year financing and coordination are essential.

19. Evaluations noted that, while UNDP advanced its results-based management approach and aligned its impact measurement with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), its M&E system remained underfunded, fragmented, and over-reliant on anecdotal evidence. There was inconsistent evidence that UNDP support changed institutional behaviour, service performance, and people's wellbeing. Beyond the complex nature of measuring human development, short strategic planning cycles and the challenge of attributing long-term societal changes in multi-partner initiatives hindered the effective use of results-based management and UNDP's ability to measure its impact.

20. In several contexts, these three, inter-related challenges also risked perpetuating patterns of exclusion. Where interventions were overly dispersed, financing unpredictable and learning systems weak, efforts to reach those furthest behind were often diluted or short-lived.

21. Translating the Strategic Plan ambition to Leave No One Behind proved demanding. While gender equality was increasingly integrated into programme design, interventions were often not transformative enough to dismantle systemic barriers such as discrimination, entrenched social norms and power imbalances. Similarly, engagement with people with disabilities, Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Intersex communities and other marginalized groups lacked consistency across contexts. Evidence from evaluations of digitalization and just transitions interventions showed the importance of engagement and strong safeguards to protect the equity benefits of development. When reforms advanced faster than the institutional and societal capacity to absorb them, they were more likely to exacerbate exclusion and weaken public trust and support.

22. Taken together, the evaluative evidence from 2025 painted a coherent picture. UNDP strengthened its operational foundations, proved agile in crisis and confirmed governance as its distinctive contribution. Its greatest results came when it linked community action with system reform, embedded digital and financing tools within institutions and treated inclusion as a structural priority rather than an add-on. To sustain progress, evaluations pointed to four overarching imperatives: think and act systemically; place equity at the centre of change; enhance UNDP's monitoring, evaluation and learning system, and better align financing with results. This way, UNDP would be better positioned to translate its comparative advantage into lasting, equitable development results.

III. Utility and use of Independent Evaluation Office's evaluations

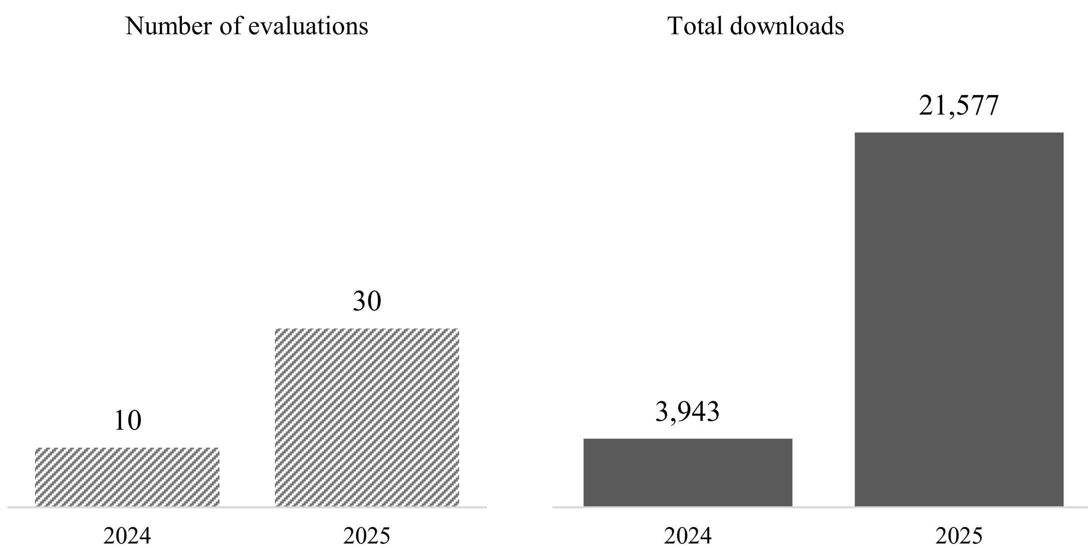
23. Analytics for 2025, together with reporting from UNDP colleagues and partners, indicated an increase in the use and influence of the work of the IEO. This appears to be associated with a number of reinforcing factors, including the Office management decision to place greater emphasis on utility and use in the design and conduct of evaluation processes; improvements in the focus and quality of evaluation reports; and sustained efforts to strengthen communication with clearer and more targeted messaging.

Downloads and reported use

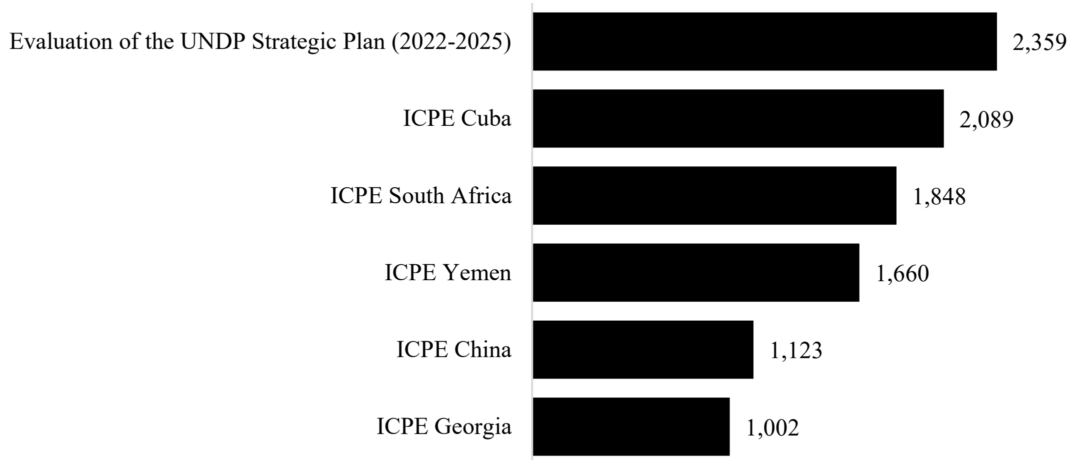
24. Access to the IEO publications increased markedly in 2025. While the number of evaluations published tripled - from 10 in 2024 to 30 in 2025 - downloads increased more than fivefold, rising from 3,943 to 21,577. On average, downloads per evaluation increased by 82 per cent, with ICPEs seeing an even larger increase of 154 per cent.

25. The Evaluation of the UNDP Strategic Plan 2022-2025 was the IEO's most downloaded report of 2025. Published in April 2025, the full report was downloaded 2,359 times, and almost 1,000 users consulted the Office website for content about this evaluation in 2025. ICPE downloads varied, with five reports downloaded over a thousand times: Cuba, South Africa, Yemen, China and Georgia. Although each ICPE focused on a single country, their reach extended far beyond UNDP Headquarters and the Country Office under review, suggesting that ICPE insights are valued globally. Syntheses were downloaded between 600 and 1,200 times.

Figure 1: While the number of evaluation reports tripled, readership increased more than five-fold



2025 reports with over 1000 downloads



26. The Office's evaluations and syntheses served as reliable sources of information for UNDP and its partners. Over 80 per cent of respondents to the 2025 stakeholder survey indicated to have used evaluations and syntheses by the IEO to stay informed through well-organized evidence and gain clearer insights. A similarly majority noted that they had used evaluations – whether corporate, thematic, or country level - to ensure accountability and promote the image of UNDP as a transparent organization. For 'Reflections' and syntheses, the second most common use was to encourage learning – in line with their intended purpose.

27. The Office's evaluations contributed to shaping decisions, although their influence varied by type. Influence was strongest for ICPEs, where 76 per cent of survey respondents reported that findings had been used in country programme document renewals. Thematic evaluations and syntheses were less consistently connected, with 68 per cent of respondents indicating use for decision-making. This could be partly explained by the broader scope of global assessments, whose direct application to country-level operations is more limited.

Drivers of evaluation uptake

28. All the Office evaluations maintained the highest standards of quality and rigor, ensuring that reports were methodologically robust, analytically credible, and aligned with United Nations norms and international best practices. Each report underwent a comprehensive internal and external peer review. In 2025, the Office began integrating foresight tools into selected evaluations to respond to increasingly dynamic and uncertain operating environments. These tools supported an "horizon scanning," guiding evaluation recommendations to consider emerging signals, risks, and opportunities for UNDP. The Office's emphasis on quality was reflected in the 2025 stakeholder survey, with around 80 per cent of respondents finding the Office's evaluations and syntheses valuable and insightful.

29. The IEO continued to strengthen the clarity of its reports by making them more focused and tailored to their intended audiences. Templates for syntheses and ICPEs were revised to enable sharper messaging, with dedicated sections for lessons learned and actionable insights. Reflection papers retained the streamlined format introduced in 2024, presenting evidence and country examples in a clear and accessible way. The Office introduced an audience and engagement survey at the outset of each evaluation, and a storyboarding session practice before drafting, to better understand stakeholder information needs, prioritize key messages, and shape evaluation narratives for maximum relevance and impact. These practices will be fully mainstreamed in 2026.

30. In-person and virtual engagement was broadened, taking the evaluation knowledge "out of the report" and directly to stakeholders to address time constraints and information overload challenges. Closer collaboration with UNDP colleagues throughout the process enhanced the relevance of

evaluations, strengthened trust, and facilitated the use of findings. Stakeholder meetings examined evidence and its implications, at country level for ICPEs and at headquarters for thematic evaluations, including with the UNDP Executive Group and the Operational Performance Group. All ‘Reflections’ were discussed in workshops, combining evaluation learning with the presentation of good practices from UNDP field experience. Evaluation evidence was also presented in select high-level fora, such as the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Belém, Brazil, with scope to expand this engagement in 2026. The Office Regional Evaluation Advisors supported the use of evaluation in decision-making, although engagement varied across regions.

31. The IEO expanded its digital engagement, balancing external and internal communication while prioritizing direct outreach for greater influence. Evaluation reports were shared through LinkedIn and Sparkblue/Viva Engage, in collaboration with UNDP Communities of Practice. More systematic dissemination to UNDP Country Offices often led to significant increases in readership of evaluations and other knowledge products, becoming the most reliable driver of downloads for ICPEs. Social media further supported visibility, particularly when UNDP Country Offices and evaluators amplified distribution through their networks.

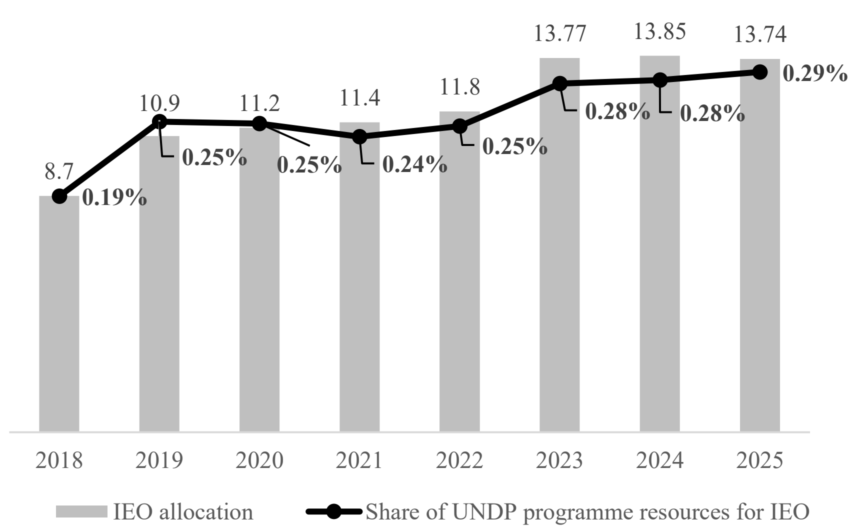
32. In April 2025, the Independent Evaluation Office relaunched its website with a refreshed design and streamlined navigation, bringing a 30 per cent user increase. The new website - available in three languages (English, French, and Spanish) – allowed the Office to present evaluation findings in more visually engaging and accessible ways. The redesign contributed to increased engagement with thematic evaluations, enhancing the reach and impact in 193 countries.

IV. Evaluation resources

The Independent Evaluation Office

33. In 2025, the IEO received nearly the same proportion of UNDP programmatic resources as in the previous two years - just below the 0.3 per cent target specified by the UNDP Evaluation Policy. The 2025 financial allocation was $13.74 million, which represented a decrease of 0.8 per cent compared to 2024 due to budget reductions at UNDP. The Office spent 94 per cent of its allocation, with the six per cent shortfall attributed to staff turnover and unfilled positions. The Office developed its 2026 work programme based on an anticipated budget of $13.52 million.

Figure II. The 2025 Independent Evaluation Office budget decreased in line with UNDP programmatic resource reduction



Source: IEO allocation data

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34. The Independent Evaluation Office maintained 34 staff positions, of which 28 were in the professional category and six in the general service category. In addition, 12 long-term consultants with international professional service contracts were part of the team. By the end of 2025, the Office had eight vacant positions.

35. The Independent Evaluation Office achieved gender balance among its personnel (57 per cent female, 43 per cent male) and ensure broad geographical representation to bring diverse perspectives into its evaluations. While most personnel remained at UNDP headquarters, 30 per cent were located outside New York: 17 per cent in UNDP regional offices and 13 per cent providing research support remotely.

UNDP

36. Overall evaluation resources declined in 2025, moving UNDP away from its corporate commitment to allocate 1 per cent of programme resources to evaluation. Total evaluation funding fell from $40.57 million in 2024 to $37.82 million in 2025, with the share of programme resources dedicated to evaluation decreasing from 0.83 per cent to 0.79 per cent. The decline was driven primarily by a reduction in funding to decentralized evaluations, which dropped from $26.72 million to $24.08 million. Although UNDP headquarters and regional bureaux increased their investment in evaluation, UNDP country offices reduced their spending on evaluation-related activities.

Table 2: UNDP evaluation resources ($ million)

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
IEO allocation	8.7	10.9	11.2	11.4	11.8	13.77	13.85	13.74
Decentralized evaluation	13.3	14.8	14.5	16.4	25.1	23.04	26.72	24.08
Total evaluation resources	22	25.7	25.7	27.8	36.9	36.81	40.57	37.82
Share of UNDP programme resources for evaluation	0.48	0.58	0.57	0.58	0.77	0.75	0.83	0.79

Source: Independent Evaluation Office allocations and UNDP reported data

V. Decentralized evaluations

Implementation

37. UNDP completed most decentralized evaluations planned for 2025. Out of the 365 evaluations originally scheduled for 2025, 314 (86 per cent) were completed – closely matching the number achieved in 2024 and likely a reflection of UNDP's absorption capacity for conducting evaluations in a single year. The largest gaps occurred in Africa (where 24 evaluations were cancelled and six remained overdue) and in the Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region.

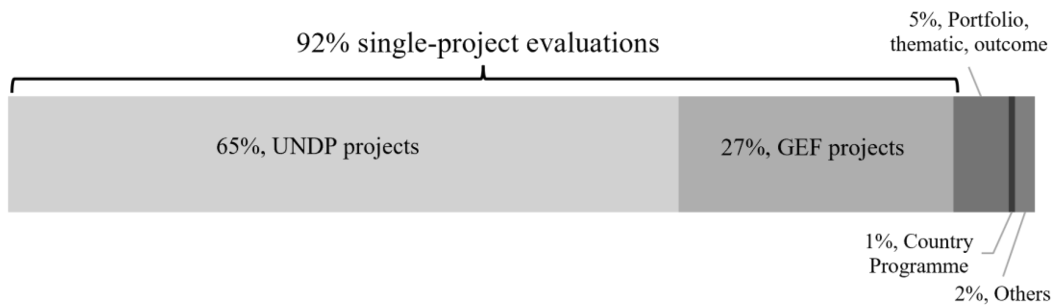
Table 3: UNDP 2025 decentralized evaluations

	Planned	Completed	Cancelled	Overdue	Expenditure ($ million)
Global*	15	13	2	0	0.56
Africa	104	74	24	6	2.80
Arab States	47	44	3	0	1.22
Asia and the Pacific	68	67	1	0	2.43
Europe and the CIS	71	58	13	0	1.47
Latin America and the Caribbean	60	58	2	0	1.49
Total	**365**	**314**	**45**	**6**	**9.97**

*Excluding UNCDF, UNOSSC, and UNV. Source: ERC, February 2026

38. UNDP decentralized evaluations continued to focus heavily on project-level initiatives, limiting opportunities for broader strategic analysis. Most evaluations (92 per cent) remained at the project level, with 289 project evaluations completed. Of these, 84 were evaluations of project funded by the GEF (27 per cent of all evaluations completed for the year). UNDP conducted only 17 portfolio/thematic/outcome evaluations, and two country programme decentralized evaluations – 24 less than in 2024. These types of evaluations accounted for just six per cent of the total, significantly below the 20 per cent target established in the Strategic Plan Integrated Results and Resource Framework for 2025.

Figure III: 92 per cent of UNDP decentralized evaluations focused on single projects



*Excluding UNCDF, UNOSSC, and UNV. Source: ERC, February 2026

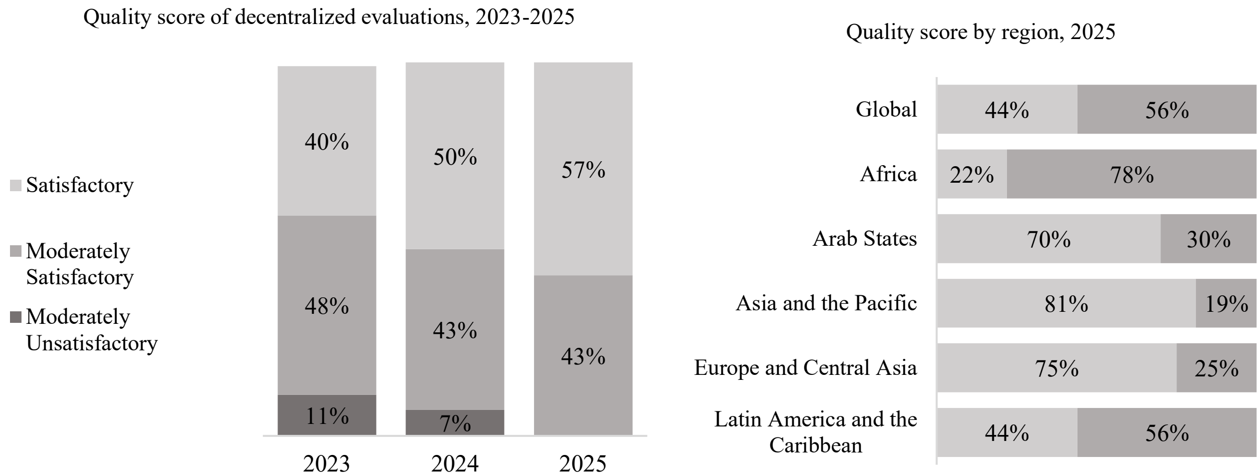
Quality

39. In 2025, the quality of decentralized evaluations continued to improve, consolidating the upward trajectory observed in recent years. Of the 256 evaluations quality-assessed, 147 (57 per cent) were rated satisfactory and 109 (42 per cent) moderately satisfactory. There was no evaluation rated unsatisfactory. The share of satisfactory evaluations rose from 39 per cent in 2023 to 57 per cent in 2025, while moderately unsatisfactory ratings declined sharply over the same period.

40. The quality review showed that the foundations of evaluation practice are strong across the organization, but that greater and more consistent attention is needed to fully integrate inclusion and cross-cutting priorities. Terms of reference and evaluation design were rated satisfactory in 72 per cent of cases, reflecting solid planning and clarity of purpose. More than half of evaluations met the satisfactory standards for report structure, methodology and data sources (58 per cent) and for findings, conclusions and recommendations (64 per cent). Cross-cutting issues - including gender equality, human rights and Leaving No One Behind - were rated satisfactory in only 38 per cent of evaluations. Strengthening this aspect will be essential to ensure that evaluations systematically assess not only effectiveness, but also equity and inclusion.

41. Quality patterns varied across UNDP regional bureaux. In three regions (Asia and the Pacific, Europe and the CIS, and the Arab States), a clear majority of evaluations met a strong standard of quality, with particularly marked improvements in countries covered by the Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS. By contrast, evaluations conducted in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and by Headquarters remained overall moderately satisfactory, with a decline in performance among countries covered by the Regional Bureau for Africa. These differences highlight the need for continued targeted support to strengthen quality where required, alongside efforts to consolidate good practices in higher-performing contexts.

Figure IV: Quality of decentralized evaluations continued to improve



Source: IEO analysis

Quality enablers

42. UNDP made substantial progress in professionalizing and strengthening its evaluation function at the decentralized level. As of end 2025, almost all evaluation focal points (220 out of 225, or 98 per cent) were certified, thanks to sustained follow-up by UNDP BPPS and regional evaluation focal points. In parallel, UNDP empowered M&E focal points to manage evaluation processes and held them accountable for the quality of decentralized evaluations through performance reviews, as confirmed by more than three quarters of the M&E officers surveyed in June 2025.

43. BPPS played an important role in reinforcing the planning, management and oversight of decentralized evaluations across UNDP. In line with the Decentralized Evaluation Strengthening strategies, the Bureau provided sustained technical advice to business units and UNDP-hosted agencies, supporting the design and implementation of evaluation plans. This included quality checks of the evaluation plans for approximately 25 new country programme documents - helping ensure that they were balanced, feasible and aligned with programme priorities. BPPS also organized five regional programme and project management workshops, each including sessions on evaluation. To promote accountability, BPPS monitored the performance of decentralized evaluations against four corporate indicators and reported regularly to UNDP Organizational Performance Group.

44. Guidance by the IEO also continued to enhance the quality of evaluation practice, supported by the Office's strengthened regional presence. The 2025 stakeholder survey results confirmed strong appreciation for the IEO capacity development workshops and widespread use of its guidance, particularly the UNDP and GEF project evaluation guidelines. Positive feedback also extended to the 'evaluation methods' page of the Evaluation Resource Center, which was revamped in 2025 and promoted through a highly successful LinkedIn campaign. While responsibility for decentralized evaluations rested with the UNDP BPPS and the regional bureaux, the IEO's responsiveness to selected requests for quality assurance helped build trust and reinforced the Office positioning as a constructive, solutions-oriented partner.

Persistent challenges

45. UNDP staff capacity to use evidence from decentralized evaluations requires further strengthening. The identified gaps related less to conducting evaluations than to using them: facilitating knowledge sharing, integrating findings into programming and decision-making, and engaging stakeholders throughout the evaluation process. Results from the 2025 stakeholder survey indicated

limited confidence in the UNDP staff ability to apply evaluation findings, with fewer than half of respondents agreeing that such capacity is in place.

46. Limited staff time and financial resources remained key constraints. Nearly half of the M&E focal points surveyed in June 2025 reported spending less than half of their working time on evaluation, while only a small minority (14 per cent) devoted most of their time to this function. Financial constraints were also identified as a significant challenge, affecting the planning and implementation of decentralized evaluations and limiting the scope for field-based work.

47. Weak incentives further reduced systematic use of evaluation evidence. Many decentralized evaluations - conducted late in the project cycle – continued to be perceived primarily as accountability tools rather than learning instruments. While a majority of survey respondents (57 per cent) perceived UNDP as having a generally strong evaluation culture, far fewer expressed confidence that staff and partners were encouraged to apply evaluation evidence. Only a small proportion (11 per cent) strongly agreed that the necessary drivers were in place, with many respondents expressing neutral views.

48. Addressing these constraints will require clearer prioritization of evaluation and stronger management engagement. UNDP M&E officers emphasized the importance of leadership involvement to mobilize support, integrate evaluation costs more systematically into project and country programme budgets, and better align workloads with available resources. They also highlighted the need to adapt evaluation approaches where appropriate, including reducing the number of evaluations when resources are insufficient or incorporating targeted evaluative work as case studies within broader programme evaluations.

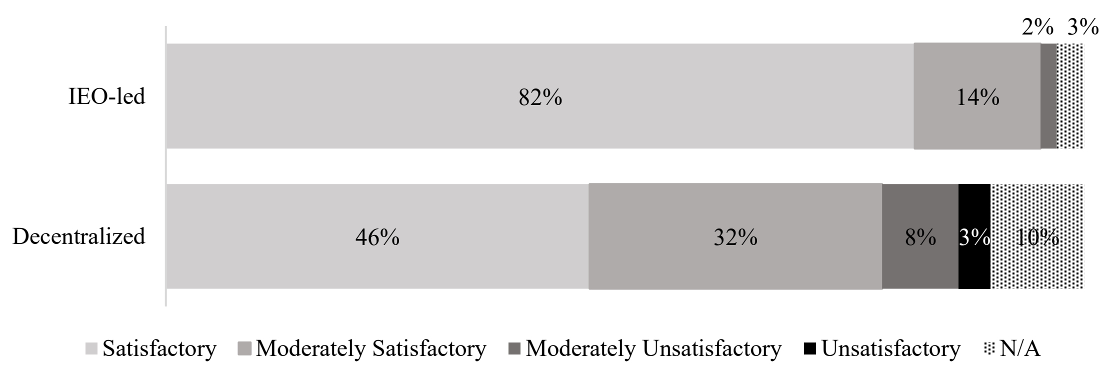
VI. Evaluation follow-up

49. UNDP demonstrated strong adherence to evaluation follow-up, with management responses provided to nearly all recently completed evaluations. All the IEO evaluations from 2021 to 2025 received a management response, as did 95 per cent of decentralized evaluations. Performance was consistently strong across regions. By contrast, follow-up was weaker for decentralized global evaluations: 10 per cent did not receive a response, and in most of these cases the response was overdue by more than six weeks.

Quality of management responses

50. UNDP management responses and action plans generally met minimum quality standards, with significantly stronger performance for those linked to IEO evaluations. A study of 125 evaluations conducted at the end of 2025 found that just under half of management responses for decentralized evaluations developed over the past four years were satisfactory in terms of relevance, clarity and precision – including specific, time-bound actions and clearly assigned responsibilities. A further 32 per cent was considered moderately satisfactory, while 11 per cent did not meet minimum quality thresholds.

Figure V: Quality of management responses for evaluations by the Independent Evaluation Office was much higher than for decentralized evaluations



Source: Study on management response implementation

51. In practice, management responses frequently reinterpreted evaluation recommendations, often narrowing them, with limited transparency regarding the rationale for these adjustments. Even when recommendations were formally accepted, there was no clear indication that they had been interpreted at the highest level before being turned into concrete actions. In addition, around one third of management responses consolidated multiple recommendations or omitted specific elements, particularly when evaluations presented lengthy or multi-layered recommendation lists. The reasoning behind these modifications was rarely documented.

Implementation

52. UNDP reported solid progress in implementing the evaluation recommendations, although performance continued to vary across regions, broadly in line with previous years. Overall, 73 per cent of actions were completed, 15 per cent initiated, eight per cent either not initiated or overdue, and five per cent no longer applicable. Compared with 2024, all offices increased the proportion of completed actions. The Asia and Pacific region performed best, while UNDP offices in Africa and global decentralized evaluations lagged behind more, with higher shares of overdue or not initiated actions.

Table 4: Completion of decentralized evaluations' action plans, by region (2022-2025)

	Completed	Initiated	Not initiated	Overdue	No longer applicable
Global	72%	13%	7%	5%	3%
Africa	64%	16%	5%	10%	5%
Arab States	68%	21%	4%	1%	6%
Asia and the Pacific	82%	12%	1%	0%	5%
Europe and the CIS	74%	15%	6%	0%	5%
Latin America and the Caribbean	75%	13%	2%	5%	5%
Average	**73%**	**15%**	**4%**	**4%**	**5%**

*Excluding UNCDF, UNOSSC, and UNV. Source: ERC data, February 2026

53. UNDP generally acted on recommendations from the IEO, although not in a consistent manner. Sixty-four per cent of actions arising from the Office evaluations conducted between 2022 and 2025 were reported as completed and 13 per cent initiated, while 17 per cent remained overdue and six per cent had not yet been initiated. Overdue actions stemmed from 22 evaluations, predominantly ICPEs in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, along with five thematic evaluations.

54. While most action plans reported achievements, the quality of the evidentiary basis was not always robust. The study found that 81 per cent of actions had been implemented to a satisfactory standard, with 53 per cent rated fully satisfactory and 28 per cent moderately satisfactory. Nonetheless, in some instances, it remained unclear which outputs or milestones had actually been achieved, with management responses often stopping at the stage of intentions or future plans. When action plans were vague or insufficiently defined, implementation tended to stall, became more limited in scope, or proved difficult to assess.

55. Implementation gaps were most evident when the responsibility was shared among multiple actors – particularly those outside UNDP - or when required resources had not been anticipated. Actions involving multiple stakeholders, higher organizational levels and/or external partners were more likely to be delayed or deemed no longer relevant. By contrast, tasks assigned to clearly defined units within country, regional, or headquarters structures were more likely to be completed. While many follow-up actions required additional capacity, technical work, or funding, management responses often failed to consistently consider these resource needs – hampering implementation even when there was a clear commitment to proceed.

Beyond management responses

56. The study confirmed that management responses capture only part of how evaluations influence decision-making. In practice, the greatest influence often occurred during or immediately after the evaluation process, when emerging findings were discussed - exchanges that were frequently more

catalytic than formal follow-up mechanisms. In some cases, management responses merely recorded decisions that have already been made. Evaluations also shaped change in ways not fully reflected in formal tracking systems, most often by influencing strategic thinking and direction. They supported dialogue with donors, strengthened collaboration with government partners, reinforced UNDP's credibility, and provided justification for sensitive or politically complex decisions. In several instances, findings informed adjustments to implementation models and encouraged more realistic objective-setting aligned with available resources.

VII. IEO contribution to global partnerships

57. In 2025, the IEO clarified and consolidated its role in global partnerships. As the focus remained on supporting shared directions, learning and exchanging knowledge, the Office was more deliberate in the allocation of its limited resources – a move made possible by the partnerships and investments established in earlier years.

National evaluation capacity development

58. The IEO reoriented its approach to national evaluation capacity development (NECD), moving away from stand-alone training toward strengthening broader evidence ecosystems. This shift, in line with successive Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review resolutions, was reflected in the Independent Evaluation Office Capacity Development Strategy 2025-2029, which emphasized the importance of connecting institutions, aligning partners, and promoting national ownership. By working with United Nations entities, academic institutions, and international partners, the Office will aim to improve coordination, reduce duplication, and make more effective use of existing resources, creating a stronger foundation for sustainable evaluation capacity.

59. To implement the strategy, the IEO prioritized strengthening the United Nations' collective contribution to NECD. As leader of the UNEG NECD Interest Group, the Office helped map initiatives in 35 countries, identifying instances where multiple agencies provided support through training, policy guidance, or technical assistance. The Office also partnered with the United Nations System Wide Evaluation Office, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) on an official side event at the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Operational Activities Segment session on *Effective accountability: United Nations system evaluation for Member States*. With the renewed emphasis on the United Nations contributions to NECD, the IEO chose to step back from its co-chair position in the World Bank–managed Global Evaluation Initiative, while still collaborating and helping to shape the Initiative's strategy.

60. In parallel, the Office deepened its partnership with the German Institute for Development Evaluation and other United Nations entities to develop an evaluation system maturity model. The model is being designed to help countries progress beyond existing NECD efforts which are focused on measuring national evaluation capacities. It will provide practical steps for embedding evaluation into governance structures, thereby enhancing decision-making, accountability, and public trust over time.

61. Additionally, the Office worked with UNDP to integrate evaluation as a component of its governance programming. In April 2025, it presented the case of evaluation integration to the official FutureGov side event of the annual meeting of the Community of Experts on Public Administration.

The Global SDG Synthesis Coalition

62. Since its launch in 2022, the IEO played a central convening and leadership role in the Global SDG Synthesis Coalition, helping turn a shared ambition - stronger evidence on "what works" for the SDGs - into a functioning, multi-agency platform. What began as an informal collaboration among United Nations evaluation offices grew into a broad partnership, bringing together United Nations entities, bi- and multi-lateral organizations, foundations, and research institutions.

63. In 2025, supported by the IEO, the Coalition was also able to unlock substantial technical and financial support for synthesis on sustainable development priorities. $126 million in foundational investments for the Evidence Synthesis Infrastructure Collaborative were announced at the 2025 United

Nations General Assembly. This marked a step change in both the scale and ambition of global synthesis efforts, enabling the Coalition to move beyond isolated, project-based syntheses towards a coordinated, long-term infrastructure that supports policy-relevant synthesis across the SDGs.

64. As the Coalition entered its next phase, its governance and operating arrangements also matured. With core funding secured, the Office will remain as the Coalition's Chair, supported by a dedicated and fully funded Secretariat. A multi-stakeholder group representing the Coalition's growing and diverse partnerships will provide guidance and direction.

The United Nations Evaluation Group

65. The IEO continued to play a strong and visible role within UNEG, contributing to the advancement of evaluation norms and methods across the United Nations system. The Office continued to chair UNEG and house its Secretariat. Its staff participated in 13 UNEG working groups covering core areas, including gender equality, disability and human rights; climate change and environment; data and artificial intelligence; and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Through this engagement, the Office contributed to collective knowledge sharing and peer learning, reinforcing UNEG's role as the custodian of evaluation quality, independence, and credibility across the United Nations system.

66. The IEO exercised leadership in selected UNEG workstreams that are central to strengthening the use and future relevance of evaluation. It coordinated the Behavioral Science in Evaluation Interest Group, advancing practical insights on the cognitive, institutional, and incentive-related factors that shape whether and how evaluation findings are used. It also continued its leadership in the Synthesis Working Group, serving for a third year as co-convener and leading efforts to raise synthesis standards across the United Nations system, including through guidance development, capacity-building workshops, and learning exchanges with the global evidence synthesis community. In parallel, the Office contributed to methodological innovation on foresight in evaluation, demonstrating how scenario-building can strengthen recommendations.

VIII. Evaluation in UNDP hosted entities

The United Nations Office for South South Cooperation

67. The United Nations Office for South South Cooperation (UNOSSC) completed two evaluations in 2025.

68. The Evaluation of the Strategic Framework of UNOSSC, 2022-2025 found that the Office had played an instrumental role in promoting South-South and Triangular cooperation, with strong results materializing from its policy advocacy and capacity development efforts globally and across the United Nations system. The UNOSSC's contributions to General Assembly processes, intergovernmental dialogue and guidance strengthened institutional legitimacy and encouraged a system-wide uptake of South-South and Triangular cooperation. Most planned results in these areas were on track.

69. UNOSSC performance in knowledge exchange, innovation and trust fund–supported interventions, however, needs improvement: its value-added proposition was insufficiently clear, the alignment with country priorities weak, and evidence of impact limited. The evaluation recommended UNOSSC to clarify its catalytic role and make targeted adjustments to remain fit for a rapidly evolving cooperation landscape. These include prioritizing high-impact interventions; matching ambition with institutional capacity; and strengthening adaptive learning through more robust results-based management.

70. The Evaluation of the United Nations System-wide Strategy on South-South and Triangular Cooperation 2020-2025 found the Strategy highly relevant. It served as a useful reference at headquarters and helped elevate South-South and Triangular Cooperation across United Nations entities and country-level programming. The Strategy, however, lacked clarity on the United Nations system's collective value proposition and collaborative advantage. Positive results achieved by individual agencies largely reflected their own mandates rather than value added from the Strategy. Underinvestment, frequent turnover of focal points and weak institutional anchoring reduced continuity and impact. Effectiveness and sustainability were further constrained by the absence of baselines and targets, which limited accountability and learning.

71. The evaluation recommended that the next Strategy defines a clear vision and collective value proposition; strengthen results-based accountability and leadership oversight; reposition the inter-agency mechanism as a partnership platform; promote joint programming and resource mobilization; and invest in stronger institutional arrangements.

72. Both evaluations were designed to inform the UNOSSC Strategic Framework 2026-2029 and the United Nations System-wide Strategy for South-South and Triangular Cooperation. Timelines were synchronized so evidence could directly shape strategic choices, results frameworks and institutional positioning. The alignment between the two evaluations enabled more efficient data collection, closer collaboration between evaluators and planners and a more coherent evidence base for decision-making. Close engagement between teams ensured that findings and recommendations were integrated throughout the planning process. UNOSSC also held targeted briefings to share results with stakeholders and adopted a participatory management response approach, reinforcing ownership and accountability.

The United Nations Volunteers

73. In 2025, the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) completed the final evaluation of its Strategic Framework 2022–2025. The evaluation reaffirmed UNV’s commitment to accountability, learning and innovation, offering a valuable evidence base for the 2026–2029 planning cycle.

74. The evaluation found that the UNV Strategic Framework aligned with the evolving United Nations development agenda and the SDGs.

75. The number of volunteers increased from 12,408 in 2022 to 14,631 in 2024, with growing demand for national United Nations Volunteers and volunteers in Latin America and Europe. This rise was largely due to ongoing crises in these regions, to which UNV was able to respond by attracting qualified talents. West and Central Africa saw a slight decline due to a reduction in peacekeeping missions. UNV expanded engagement with United Nations entities – notably UNDP, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization – and it was recognized for its agility, diversity, and local engagement. It advanced gender equality and disability inclusion, with more female volunteers and a growing number of volunteers with disabilities.

76. Digital transformation improved UNV’s operational efficiency, although challenges remained in matching assignments, staffing field support functions, and efficiently deploying fully funded volunteers. Ninety-five per cent of partners were satisfied with recruitment and deployment.

77. UNV’s financial sustainability was supported by cost recovery and donor partnerships. As Special Voluntary Fund contributions declined slightly, further donor diversification was found to be needed.

78. The evaluation recommended:

(a) Enhancing strategic alignment of volunteerism and UN Volunteer engagement with United Nations system priorities and planning frameworks.

(b) Raising the profile of volunteerism by empowering United Nations Volunteers to actively champion their roles as advocates of the SDGs.

(c) Enhancing operational efficiency by improving digital integration, user experience, and system responsiveness.

(d) Making volunteer mobilization more effective through an integrated, organization-wide strategy that supports alignment, capacity, and responsiveness.

(e) Improving operational flexibility and responsiveness to better meet the evolving needs of UN entities and communities.

(f) Enhancing the institutional integration and visibility of volunteerism within development frameworks by strengthening UNV’s outreach, engagement, and communication strategies.

(g) Broadening the donor base for the Fully Funded Programme and the Special Voluntary Fund, reflecting the Member State support for UNV’s mandate and volunteerism.

(h) Strengthening the integration of cross-cutting priorities - particularly gender equality and disability inclusion - within UNV’s service offer.

79. UNV continued to facilitate the integration of emerging evaluation talents to support developing evaluation capacities in the United Nations system. In collaboration with UNEG, in 2025 UNV deployed 10 Young Emerging Evaluators to six United Nations entities (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund; UNICEF, the United Nations University, the World Health Organization) in eight countries (Kenya, Senegal, Hungary, Japan, Panama, Qatar, Thailand, Uruguay).

80. To avoid scope overlapping with the 2024 mid-term review and the final evaluation of the Strategic Framework 2022-2025, both of which addressed gender-related aspects, the planned gender evaluation was postponed to 2026. The revised timeline will ensure the implementation of the management response of both exercises (including the gender-related findings) and enable a more robust analysis of their effects. The dedicated gender evaluation will focus on the institutional dimensions of gender mainstreaming, both within UNV's workforce and in UNV mobilization practices.

The United Nations Capital Development Fund

81. Reaffirming its commitment to robust evaluation, the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) significantly scaled its evaluative work in 2025, tripling the number and investing $0.99 million in independent evaluations. Of the nine evaluations started, three were completed and six are due to be finalized by mid-2026. They covered 37 countries and a portfolio of approximately $500 million.

82. The final evaluation of the YouthStart-Entrepreneurship Programme assessed the initiative's impact on financial access for underserved youth. It highlighted UNCDF's success in leveraging digital financial services to improve economic inclusion. While the program was highly relevant and efficient, the transition to sustainable business models for financial service providers after the intervention remained a challenge. Recommendations emphasized the need for longer implementation timeframes and a more systematic approach to knowledge management.

83. The formative evaluation of the Last Mile Finance Trust Fund confirmed that UNCDF's approach of taking early-stage risks in high-risk markets can effectively pave the way for larger financiers. As a formative evaluation, the recommendations focused on how UNCDF could design a new Investment Finance platform for least developed countries built around lessons learned and best practices of other funds. These would include a strategic value proposition with a theory of change and a clear development results framework, fund- and instrument-level key performance indicators, a multi-year funding strategy including reflows, clear financial and results reporting, sound governance and oversight mechanisms, and an explicit knowledge function.

84. The final evaluation of the Kibira Peace Sanctuary project analyzed its relevance in high-conflict, high-risk environments, focusing on the intersection of environmental conservation and peacebuilding. The evaluation commended the use of blended finance to make community-led projects bankable through the "Bankable Kibira" model. The model successfully reduced social conflict by providing sustainable, forest-friendly livelihoods for local communities. More robust monitoring is required to better capture the direct contributions of these financial investments to local peace and stability outcomes.

85. As UNCDF transitions into its new Strategic Framework 2026-2029, its evaluation function is evolving to meet the demands of a more complex development finance landscape. A primary focus for 2026 will be the increased evaluation of financial instruments and investment programs, ensuring that UNCDF's unique mandate as a catalytic finance entity is backed by rigorous evidence. This evolution includes the integration of a newly created Impact Measurement, Verification, and Learning unit. This shift is designed to strengthen the organization's overall data collection and impact measurement capabilities, enhancing the availability of robust evidence to inform future evaluations and drive organizational learning.